

## Message Text

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21

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

SAB-01 SAM-01 SSM-03 IO-13 /076 W

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P 091447Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1031

INFO USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6050

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: FRANGIE'S APPOINTMENT OF CHAMOUN AS FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: (A) USUN 2724, (B) USUN 2756, (C) USUN 2761, (D) USUN 2777

1. OUTLINED BELOW IS EMBASSY VIEW OF LEBAL POLITICAL ISSUES SURROUNDING FRANGIE'S RECENT APPOINTMENT OF CAMILLE CHAMOUN AS FOREIGN MINISTER, WHICH WE SUBMIT FOR INFO AND COMMENTS OF ADDRESSEES.

2. ARTICLE 53 OF THE LEBANESE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT "THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC SHALL APPOINT AND DISMISS MINISTERS." ARTICLE 54 DECLARES THAT THE PRESIDENT CAN DO THIS WITHOUT COUNTER-SIGNATURE OF A MINISTER. THUS, FRANGIE SEEMS TO BE WITHIN HIS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS IN THE NARROW SENSE. HOWEVER, A TRADITION HAS EXISTED WHEREBY THE PRIME MINISTER COUNTER-SIGNS DECREES APPOINTING AND DISMISSING MINISTERS. FRANGIE HAS VIOLATED THAT TRADITION. BY ACTING UNILATERALLY IN A HIGHLY CHARGED SITUATION, FURTHERMORE, HE HAS COMMITTED A POLITICAL ACT THAT IS AT BEST CONTROVERSIAL AND AT WORST HIGHLY DESTABILIZING.

3. THIS ACTION IS CONNECTED WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT ERUPTED EARLY IN THE CRISIS CONCERNING THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME  
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MINISTER. THE ARGUMENT DEALT WITH THE WHOLE RANGE OF THEIR

RELATIVE POWERS, NOT JUST THE QUESTION OF APPOINTING AND DISMISSING MINISTERS. MOSLEMS FELT THAT THE PRESIDENT'S CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION NEEDED TO BE RESTRICTED AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S STRENGTHENED. THIS WAS ONE OF THE DEMANDS PICKED UP IN JUMBLATT'S AUGUST 1975 REFORM DOCUMENT. IT WAS A STEADY THEME IN MOSLEM/LEFTIST DEMANDS FROM THAT TIME ON. THE POWER OF APPOINTMENT AND DISMISSAL OF MINISTERS FIGURED IN THIS DEBATE.

4. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S STILL-PENDING DOCUMENT OF LAST FEBRUARY 14 CONTAINED REFORMS ON CABINET FORMATION THAT BRING THE PRIME MINISTER INTO THE PICTURE MORE THAN BEFORE. THESE CHANGES WERE THE RESULT OF EXTENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS UNDER SYRIAN AEGIS. THE EXACT EXTENT OF THE REFORM THAT FRANGIE PROPOSED INVOLVING APPOINTMENT AND DISMISSAL OF MINISTERS IS NOT CLEAR, BUT IT APPEARS THE PRIME MINISTER'S COUNTER-SIGNATURE WOULD BE REQUIRED ON APPOINTMENTS AT LEAST. CONSEQUENTLY, IN NAMING CHAMOUN TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRY POST, FRANGIE SEEMS TO BE GOING BACK ON THE PROPOSALS HE MADE LAST FEBRUARY.

5. CONCERNING AMBASSADOR GHORRA'S CIRCULATION OF DOCUMENTS WITHIN UN IN NEW YORK, WE VIEW SEEMS CORRECT TO US THAT HIS RIGHT TO DO SO SHOULD NOT BE QUESTIONED AS LONG AS HIS CREDENTIALS AS LEBANESE REPRESENTATIVE REMAIN UNCHALLENGED. CRUNCH WILL COME IF KARAME SEEKS TO REPLACE GHORRA NOW THAT LATTER APPEARS TO HAVE OPTED FOR CHAMOUN. KARAME'S RIGHT TO DO SO UNDER LEBANESE AND INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE IS DOUBTFUL, BUT HE MAY TRY IT.

6. US NOW HAS THREE OPTIONS; 1) SEEK TO MAINTAIN NEUTRAL AND UNINVOLVED POSITION, ABIDING BY PREVALENT LEGAL OPTIONS;; 2) SUPPORT GHORRA, AND BY EXTENSION CHAMOUNIST POSITION; OR 3) SUPPORT KARAME POSITION. SINCE WE NEED NOT TAKE POSITION NOW, OPTION 1 IS VIABLE AT PRESENT. BUT IT MAY PROVE DIFFICULT TO AVOID THE ISSUE FOR LONG. PART OF CHAMOUN'S GAME PLAN, AS WE SEE IT, IS TO FORCE INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF HIS STATUS AS FOREIGN MINISTER. KARAME CANNOT AFFORD TO LET THIS CHALLENGE PASS AND WILL SEEK TO FORCE CONTRARY RECOGNITION. ONLY RELIEF IN SIGHT FROM CONFRONTATION IS FACT THAT SARKIS WILL PRESUMABLY ASSUME PRESIDENCY SEPTEMBER 23 AT LATEST AND THEN NAME NEW CABINET.

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7. ANY USG POSITION, OF COURSE, SHOULD BE CLOSELY COORDINATED WITH OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES WITH MEANINGFUL INTEREST IN LEBANESE SITUATION, PARTICULARLY BRITAIN AND FRANCE. WE WILL SOUND OUT VIEWS THEIR EMBASSIES HERE.

8. REQUEST DEPARTMENT VIEWS.  
SEELYE

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** DOCUMENTS, CIVIL DISORDERS, POLITICAL SITUATION, DIPLOMATIC NOTES, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 09 JUL 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** ElyME  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976BEIRUT06050  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Office:** ACTION NEA  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** ElyME  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 17 MAY 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <17 MAY 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <20 OCT 2004 by ElyME>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** FRANGIE'S APPOINTMENT OF CHAMOUN AS FOREIGN MINISTER  
**TAGS:** PFOR, PINT, LE, (CHAMOUN, CAMILLE)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006